

## MITIGATION AND ACTION PLAN

The risk assessment identified locations in the county that are at high risk and are high priority for mitigation work. Based on field sampling it has also been established that 45% to 50% of the homes in the rural setting are at high risk. Several deficiencies related to preparedness were also noted during the risk assessment. In this section of the plan, hazardous fuels treatment work to mitigate the risk to homes and businesses from wildfire will be discussed. Mitigation issues related to wildland fire preparedness will also be addressed.

### MITIGATION OF HAZARDOUS FUELS

**Goals and Objectives:** Reduce the risk to life and property, increase fire fighter and the public's safety and reduce fire suppression costs through forest fuels modification.

**Who is Responsible:** BONFIRE Program, in cooperation with private property owners, Federal, state, and local government land management agencies.

**Funding Sources:** State Fire Assistance Hazard Mitigation Program, Idaho Dept. of Lands: Forest Stewardship Program, Idaho Dept. of Lands: Communities at Risk, Bureau of Land Management.

**Timeframe for Completion:** Ongoing

The Bureau of Land Management has designated all of the communities in Bonner County as Communities at Risk to wildfire. The field sample taken to determine the extent of risk to homes from wildfire reinforces this designation and indicates that there is a need for hazardous fuel treatment work around a high proportion of homes in Bonner County. Hazardous fuel treatment around homes will create three distinct benefits.

**First**, the treatment will create a defensible space around the buildings. This space would provide a safe place for fire suppression crews to work while providing structure protection from an oncoming wildfire. Photo 1 illustrates a home with good defensible/survivable space.

**Second**, the treatments will create a survivable space. This space will improve the chances that an undefended building and any occupants would survive an oncoming wildfire. Studies indicate that a home with survivable space left alone in the advance of a wildfire has an 85% higher chance of surviving a wildfire than one that does not have the protection provided by the survivable space (Firewise, 2003).



**Photo 1: Good Defensible Space** (Source: Boundary County Fire Safe)

**Third**, the defensible/survivable space will help fire fighters prevent a house fire from spreading into the forest, where it would threaten forest resources or other nearby buildings.

Photo 1 shows a home with good defensible space and fire safe landscaping. However it is not necessary to go to the extent depicted in photo 1 in order to provide defensible space and change fire behavior. Photos 2 and 3 are examples of more common conditions one would expect to find in Bonner County. Both photos are taken from the same location. Photo 2 shows conditions before hazardous fuels treatment work while photo 3 shows the setting after hazardous fuels treatment work was completed. Pruning, thinning, and brush removal were used to eliminate the ladder fuels thus reducing expected fire behavior to a more manageable condition for fire suppression crews. The perimeter for defensible space should be a minimum of 100 feet from a structure, and may be greater depending on forest fuel conditions and surrounding topographic features that affect fire behavior.



**Photo 2: Before Hazardous Fuels Treatment Work** (Source: Boundary County Fire Safe)



**Photo 3: After Hazardous Fuels Treatment Work** (Source: Boundary County Fire Safe)



## **Existing Projects**

### **Hope Face**

In 2002 Bonner County received \$250,000 in National Fire Plan grant funding for hazardous fuels treatment projects. Since the county did not have a program in place to manage the projects, Idaho Department of Lands provided this service. The corridor along State Highway 200, between the Pack River and the Montana state line, has been the focus of hazardous fuels treatment work under the direction of the Idaho Department of Lands. The emphasis of the project is to provide hazardous fuels treatment work for the creation of defensible/survivable space around homes and the construction of community fuel breaks. As of the date of this plan, work has been completed on 61 projects covering 229 acres at a cost of \$944/acre. This equates to a total expenditure of \$216,179. Management of the Hope Face project may be transferred to **BONFIRE**, Bonner County's Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Program.

## **Fire Agency Identified Project Priorities**

The Bonner County Wildland Fire Mitigation Committee asked local fire districts to develop mitigation strategies to address the threat of wildland fire to the community. Each of the districts provided a list of mitigation projects and equipment needs they felt would address this issue.

Several locations within the county were identified as being at high risk to wildfire by the fire districts. Since grant funding for hazardous fuels treatment projects is limited from year to year, the Wildland Fire Mitigation Committee felt the necessity to prioritize the list of high-risk areas. The list includes the number of acres to be treated, an estimate of the cost to do the fuels treatment work, and the type of fuels treatment work anticipated.

Most fuels treatment projects will entail creating defensible space around homes. As previously mentioned field sampling, approximately 47% of the homes in Bonner County are at high-risk. Consequently, the first objective of the mitigation plan will be to create defensible space around the high-risk homes in high priority areas of the county. Since not every home in a priority area is at high-risk, the acreage for hazardous fuels treatment work will be less than the total area for a priority location. For example, priority areas 1 and 2 cover an area of 2000 acres in which approximately 960 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work will be done. A map showing the priority areas can be found in Appendix G and are listed in order of priority below.

### **1 – Baldy Mountain Rd., West Pine St. Area**

The project area includes hazardous fuels treatment work on approximately 640 acres. The estimated cost to complete hazardous fuels treatment work in the area is \$500,000. Hazardous fuels treatment work will be concentrated on providing defensible/survivable space around homes and businesses.

### **2 – Schweitzer Mountain Road Area**

The project is an extension of priority 1 and encompasses an additional 320 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work. This will require another \$250,000 to complete. The project will provide defensible/survivable space around homes and businesses and create a fuel break along the length of Schweitzer Mountain Road. The aggregate cost of priorities 1 and 2 is \$750,000. Priority areas 1 and 2 include portions of Sand Creek and Chuck Slough in Sandpoint.

### **3 – Portion of the Gold Hill Area**

In addition to the hazardous fuels treatment work under priorities 1 and 2, 320 acres will be treated in the Gold Hill Area. The added cost will be \$250,000. Again the emphasis of this priority will be to provide defensible/survivable space for homes. The aggregate cost of priorities 1 through 3 is \$1,000,000

### **4 – Additional work in Gold Hill Area**

This priority includes another 320 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work in the Gold Hill Area where defensible/survivable space will be provided for homeowners. The added cost will be \$250,000 for an aggregate cost of \$1,250,000

### **5 – Portion of the West Settlement and Coolin-Cavanaugh Bay Areas**

This priority adds 320 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work in the Priest Lake area. Defensible/survivable space will be developed around homes and businesses. This priority adds another \$250,000 in cost. The aggregate cost of priorities 1 through 5 is \$1,500,000

### **6 – Portions of the West Settlement/Coolin-Cavanaugh Bay Area**

This priority adds another 320 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work in the Priest Lake area. Again the emphasis is to provide defensible/survivable space for homes and businesses. The priority will add another \$250,000 in cost and raise the aggregate cost of priorities 1 through 6 to \$1,750,000.

### **7 – Blanchard Area**

This priority adds 320 acres of hazardous fuels treatment work in the Blanchard Area and will cost an additional \$250,000 to complete. The emphasis, as with the other priorities, will be to develop defensible/survivable space around homes and businesses. This will add another \$250,000 in cost and raise the aggregate cost to \$2,000,000 for priorities 1 to 7.

## 8 – Other Locations

As additional funding becomes available, the other locations identified as high risk by the fire districts should be targeted for hazardous fuels treatment projects. The remaining locations are lower Riser Creek, Sam Owen Peninsula, West Oden Bay, Sunnyside, and the Hoo Doo Loop Rd. area.

National Fire Plan grant funds are available, and should be sought, to help pay for hazardous fuels treatment work related to reducing the risk from wildfire. Grant fund requests should be based on the priorities and objectives established in this plan.

*Since there are homes at high risk throughout the county, it is suggested that a portion of the funding be set aside for hazardous fuels treatment work outside of the established priorities.*

## Hazardous Fuels Reduction Work Beyond Defensible Space

The guiding principles of the implementation strategy for the National Fire Plan focuses on a collaborative effort among local, state, and federal governments in setting priorities that emphasize protection for communities and high-priority watersheds at-risk. The creation of defensible space around individual homes is only a part of a strategy necessary to ensure adequate protection from wildfire. It is necessary to do hazardous fuels treatment (HFT) beyond defensible space within the wildland urban interface in order to more completely address the threat from wildfire. For purposes of this plan, **the wildland urban interface includes any wildland area within two miles of dwellings used for human habitation and/or infrastructure that serves these points of habitation** (see Appendix A for a complete definition of wildland urban interface). The feasibility of larger HFT projects on private land under the umbrella of the **BONFIRE** Program should be considered. Large HFT projects should be designed and placed in a location that provides protection for a concentration of dwellings at high risk.

Projects proposed on state and federal land within the wildland urban interface can also reduce the threat to life and property from wildfire. A list of proposed Idaho Department of Lands and Forest Service HFT projects that fall within the wildland urban interface can be found in Appendix H. Where possible, **BONFIRE** HFT work associated with the mitigation strategy of this plan should be coordinated and, if possible, co-located near or adjacent to Forest Service HFT projects.